October 2003

HEALTH SERVICES SATISFACTION

HSUOC

To effectively meet the needs of Albertans, the province's health system must listen to, respect and respond to the priorities and concerns of users of health care services. *Satisfaction with Health Care Services: A Survey of Albertans 2003* highlights the results of the Health Services Utilization and Outcomes Commission's (HSUOC) first annual provincewide survey looking at Albertans' assessment of the quality, access, safety and service satisfaction provided by the province's publicly funded health care system.

The survey findings, which are based on Albertans' actual experiences, will help health professionals, health system administrators, government and Albertans in identifying innovative ways to improve Alberta's health care system.

The executive summary and detailed survey results are available on the Health Commission's Web site at **www.hsuoc.ca.**

AT A GLANCE

How often do Albertans use the health care system?

Are Albertans satisfied with the quality and safety of health services?

Are Albertans satisfied with access to health services?

Survey Highlights

- 83% of Albertans used the health care system in the past year
- 74% of Albertans rate the quality of the health system as good, very good or excellent
- 26% of users of the health system found it difficult to very difficult to access services
- 50% of Albertans are satisfied with emergency room services
- 15% of Albertans had a serious complaint about health care services they received
- 30% of Albertans are concerned about patient safety; 14% report they or a family member have experienced a medical mistake

What is the Health Services Utilization and Outcomes Commission?

The Alberta Government created the Health Services Utilization and Outcomes Commission in June 2002 to independently monitor, evaluate and report to Albertans on the quality, safety and performance of the publicly funded health care system.

During the past year, we have consulted with Albertans, health care professionals and health administrators to identify priorities and the information that would be most beneficial in supporting continuous improvement in Alberta's health care system.

In July 2003 we released *Health Report to Albertans 2003*, which provides a detailed look at selected population health indicators measuring the effectiveness of Alberta's health system and the overall health of Albertans. For a copy, please visit our Web site at **www.hsuoc.ca.**

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Why a survey?

THE HEALTH COMMISSION believes it is important to establish ongoing, independent measures of Albertans' assessment of health quality, access, safety, and service satisfaction based on their personal experiences. The survey is a key initial step in measuring satisfaction with health care services through the eyes of Albertans, both provincewide and within each of the nine health regions.

The survey's objectives were to:

- Measure Albertans' ratings of health care services related to quality, access, safety and satisfaction for a range of services;
- Identify service characteristics that are most important to Albertans when rating their satisfaction with health services received.

How was the survey done?

104-05855/

AN INDEPENDENT company, Ipsos-Reid, conducted the survey through over 4,000 telephone interviews with Albertans 18 years or older. The margin of error is ±1.55% 19 times out of 20. Respondents surveyed had interacted with the health care system within the past 12 months. The survey took place between April 4 and 23, 2003.

What did the survey find?

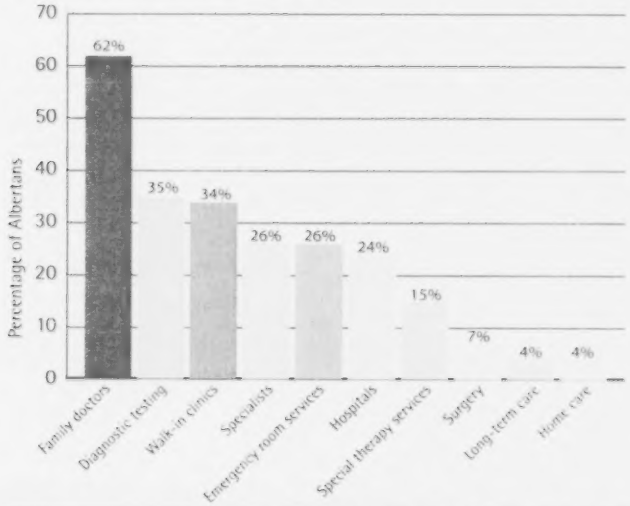
OVERALL, THE SURVEY found that the large majority of Albertans are satisfied with the quality of Alberta's health system and the services they received. At the same time, the survey identified that Albertans have concerns with access to the health care system and with some specific areas of service, including how complaints are being handled, patient safety, and emergency room services. The following are the highlights of what Albertans had to say.

How often do Albertans use the health care system?

EIGHTY-THREE PER CENT (83%) of Albertans surveyed had contact with the health care system in the past year. Of the 83%, 51% had contact within the past two months.

The following graph shows where Albertans had personal contact with the health care system in the past 12 months.

Contact with Health Care System



What do Albertans say about access to health care services?

OVERALL, FORTY-TWO PER CENT (42%) of Albertans surveyed said it is easy or very easy to access health services based on their own experiences, while 26% rated it difficult or very difficult to access health care services. Thirty-one per cent (31%) rated it neither easy nor difficult.

Having a family doctor, access to specialists, emergency room services and community walk-in clinics are areas identified as key factors for Albertans in assessing the ease of access to health services.

Ease of access varies widely across the spectrum of health care services as shown in the following chart.

What about quality?

SEVENTY-FOUR PER CENT (74%) of Albertans surveyed rated the overall quality of health care services as good, very good or excellent based on their personal experiences.

When looking at improving the health system, the most important factor identified by Albertans is improving access to services.

Other key factors associated with improved quality are:

- Improved patient safety
- Better handling of complaints
- Improved emergency room and community walk-in clinic services

Access to Health Care Services

Service	Easy	Difficult
Lab tests	81%	6%
Physical therapy services	72%	12%
Finding a family doctor	69%	15%
Diagnostic imaging	62%	16%
Home care*	61%	17%
Surgical services	58%	24%
Community walk-in clinics	54%	19%
Hospital services	52%	22%
Emergency room services	46%	31%
Specialist services	42%	36%
Long-term care for a close family member*	34%	39%

* Note: Small sample sizes. For home care, the margin of error is ±7.5%. For long-term care, the margin of error is ±7.3%.

Are Albertans satisfied with the services they get?

WHEN IT COMES to Albertans' personal experiences, the health care system is seen as doing a lot of things right. There are also a number of areas where they viewed it as needing improvement.

Albertans are most satisfied with their family doctors, laboratory tests and surgical services. They are least satisfied with emergency room services, access to long-term care and how the health care system handles complaints. As well, a large number of Albertans are concerned about patient safety.

The following chart shows that Albertans' satisfaction with health care services varies widely.

Satisfaction with Health Care Services

Service	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Family doctors	81%	5%
Lab tests	81%	6%
Surgical services	79%	9%
Special therapy services	75%	8%
Diagnostic imaging	74%	9%
Specialist services	68%	14%
Hospital care personally received	66%	14%
Home care services for a close family member*	60%	14%
Walk-in clinics	55%	21%
Emergency room services	50%	27%
Long-term care provided to close family members*	49%	20%
Complaint handling**	19%	60%

* Note: Small sample sizes. For home care, the margin of error is ±10%. For long-term care, the margin of error is ±8.1%.

** Note: Percentage applies to those Albertans who lodged a complaint.

The following chart shows the top factors influencing Albertans' satisfaction with a selection of the most frequently used health care services.

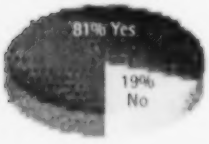
Top Four Factors Influencing Albertans' Satisfaction with Services

	1	2	3	4
Family doctors	Thoroughness of exam	Impact of care on health	Doctor spending time with you	Listening to your concerns
Walk-in clinics	Thoroughness of exam	Quality of care provided	Doctor spending time with you	Impact of care on health
ER services	Time between nurse's assessment and doctor's exam	Understanding your placement in the wait to be treated	Impact of care on health	Staff listening to your concerns
Specialists	Thoroughness of exam	Being involved in decisions	Listening to your concerns	Impact of care on health
Lab tests	Time to receive results	Time to schedule tests	Updates on wait for results	Thoroughness of tests
Hospital care (personally received)	Adequate information about condition and care	Courteous, compassionate staff	Consistent caregivers	Contact of followup care
Surgical services	Knowledge and competence	Impact of surgery on health	Preparation to manage recovery	Listening to your concerns

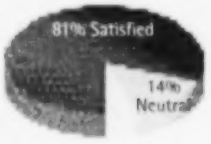
In Brief...

FAMILY DOCTORS

Incidence of having a family doctor



Overall satisfaction with family doctors

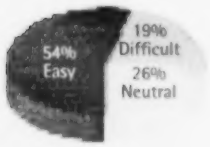


FAMILY DOCTORS were highly rated on every dimension of service examined, such as being treated with courtesy and respect, thoroughness of examinations and having enough time spent with you. This was consistent in every health region.

But while 69% say it is easy to find a family doctor, getting one is harder now than it was in the past. This is especially true for people new to Alberta, and those who sought a family doctor more recently.

COMMUNITY WALK-IN CLINICS

Access to walk-in clinics



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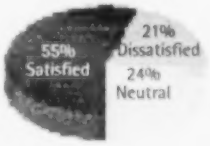


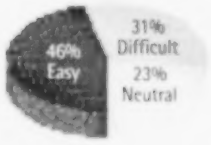
MORE THAN one-third of Albertans surveyed used a community walk-in clinic in the past year. Those more likely to go to walk-in clinics include Albertans 18 to 24 years, those with children under age 16, and people who have lived in Alberta less than 15 years. Albertans surveyed are less satisfied with the services they receive at walk-in clinics than with similar services provided by family doctors.

In terms of both access and all dimensions of service satisfaction, walk-in clinics are consistently rated much lower than family doctor services.

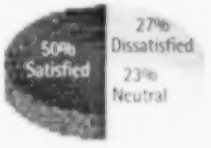
Albertans identified that they used walk-in clinics primarily because family doctor services were not available – it was after hours or the weekend – or they were unable to schedule an appointment or had to wait for an appointment with their own doctor.

EMERGENCY ROOM SERVICES

Access to ER services



Satisfaction with ER services



ONE IN FOUR Albertans surveyed had visited an emergency room one or more times in the past year to get care for themselves, a close family member or friend. Compared to satisfaction with other health care areas, Albertans' satisfaction with emergency room service is low – third lowest next to satisfaction with long-term care and how complaints are handled. Dissatisfaction with emergency room services is rated as 27%.

The most important factors influencing satisfaction with emergency room services are:

- Amount of time spent waiting to see a doctor after the nurse's initial assessment
- Emergency room staff explaining the reasons behind a patient's wait
- Listening to the patient's needs
- Impact emergency room care has on the person's life
- Amount of time the emergency room doctor spends with patients

In Brief...

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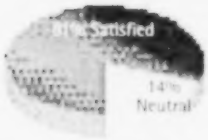
Incidence of having a family doctor

Overall satisfaction with family doctors



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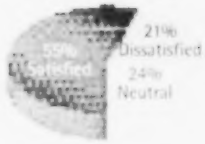

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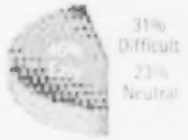

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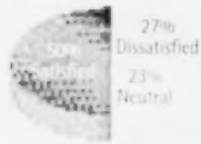

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LONG-TERM CARE

Access to long-term care

Satisfaction with long-term care services

ALTHOUGH MOST Albertans surveyed (96%) have had little interaction with long-term care, of the small sample surveyed a substantial percentage (39%) described access to long-term care services as difficult. While 49% of those who obtained long-term care for a close family member are satisfied, 20% are dissatisfied.

Overall, long-term care received relatively low satisfaction ratings across the continuum of care. Albertans suggested increasing staff, hiring better-trained staff, adding more facilities and reducing waiting lists and times as ways to increase overall satisfaction.

CONTINUITY AND COORDINATION OF CARE

Coordination of services

WHEN ASKED TO generally describe how well health care professionals coordinated their efforts to serve their needs, 83% of Albertans described coordination of services as good, very good or excellent. Satisfaction ratings were lower for some specific cases including the extent to which their family doctor was informed about other health care services they received.

Forty-nine per cent (49%) agreed their family doctor was informed about emergency room services received. Fifty-five (55%) agreed their family doctor was informed about treatment received in the hospital. Fifty-nine (59%) agreed their family doctor was informed about treatment received from a specialist, and 82% agreed their family doctor was informed about diagnostic test results.

PATIENT SAFETY

Concern about patient safety

Experience with medical mistakes

NEXT TO ACCESSIBILITY, patient safety is the second most important factor that Albertans associate with the overall quality of our health care system. Fourteen (14%) reported they or a member of their immediate family have experienced a medical mistake that resulted in serious harm such as death, disability or additional prolonged treatment in the past year. Women are more concerned about patient safety than men, as are people with children under age 16 and those who use health care services beyond a family doctor or walk-in clinic.

COMPLAINTS

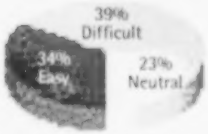
Incidence of complaints

Satisfaction with how complaints were addressed

COMPLAINT HANDLING is a key factor associated with satisfaction with the overall quality of Alberta's health care system. Sixty per cent (60%) of Albertans who voiced a complaint or wrote to someone are dissatisfied with how it was handled and addressed. Over half of those who complained did so face-to-face with a health care professional. Forty-one per cent (41%) did not report their complaint and 6% voiced their complaint in a letter. For Albertans, reducing the incidence and better handling of complaints is perceived as important in improving the quality of our health care system.

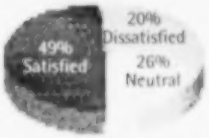
LONG-TERM CARE

Access to long-term care



4% Don't know

Satisfaction with long-term care services



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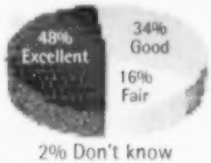

2% Don't know

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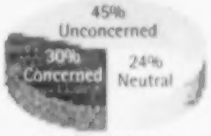
PATIENT SAFETY

Concern about patient safety



1% Don't know

Experience with medical mistakes

1% Don't know

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COMPLAINTS

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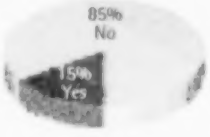
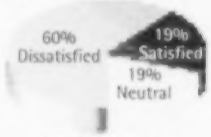


Satisfaction with how complaints were addressed



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COMPLAINT HANDLING is a key factor associated with satisfaction with the overall quality of Alberta's health care system. Sixty per cent (60%) of Albertans who voiced a complaint or wrote to someone are dissatisfied with how it was handled and addressed. Over half of those who complained did so face-to-face with a health care professional. Forty-one per cent (41%) did not report their complaint and 6% voiced their complaint in a letter. For Albertans, reducing the incidence and better handling of complaints is perceived as important in improving the quality of our health care system.

Regional Overview

ARE THERE DIFFERENCES between the health regions?

Yes and no. While the nine health regions share some important similarities in terms of Albertans' views, there are also some significant differences.

All regions share comparatively high ratings for accessibility and satisfaction with family doctors (69% and 81% provincially) and for accessibility and satisfaction with lab tests (81% and 81% provincially).

Residents in the health regions reported lower ratings for the ease of access to, and satisfaction with, emergency room services (46% and 50% provincially) and community walk-in clinics (54% and 55% provincially). Residents of all regions also reported lower ratings for ease of access to specialists (42% provincially).

Alberta's Health Regions

1. CHINOOK
2. PALLISER
3. CALGARY
4. DAVID THOMPSON
5. EAST CENTRAL
6. CAPITAL
7. ASPEN
8. PEACE COUNTRY
9. NORTHERN LIGHTS

Provincial Overview

		Overall Access	Overall Quality*	Family Doctors	Community Walk-in Clinics	ER Services	Specialists	Diagnostic Imaging	Lab Tests	Hospital Services (Personal)	Patient Safety
Alberta	% easy access	42		69	54	46	42	62	81	56	% concerned 30
	% satisfied		74	81	55	50	68	74	81	66	% not concerned 45

Regional Overview

		Overall Access	Overall Quality*	Family Doctors	Community Walk-in Clinics	ER Services	Specialists	Diagnostic Imaging	Lab Tests	Hospital Services (Personal)	Patient Safety
1 Chinook	% easy access	46		85↑	59	47	37	65	88	63	% concerned 28
	% satisfied		76	84	63	54	73	76	88↑	60↓	% not concerned 43
2 Palliser	% easy access	46		75	57	45	47	62	84	72↑	% concerned 31
	% satisfied		78	79	60	49	64	71	75	86↑	% not concerned 42
3 Calgary	% easy access	41		64↓	52	36↓	38↓	58↓	80	48↓	% concerned 28
	% satisfied		74	80	55↓	45↓	68	73	77	70	% not concerned 47↑
4 David Thompson	% easy access	47		76	61	58	50	65	85	53	% concerned 31
	% satisfied		79↑	85	65	53	74	84↑	89↑	68	% not concerned 47↑
5 East Central	% easy access	57↑		81↑	57	70↑	50	64	88	67↑	% concerned 30
	% satisfied		82↑	82	65	75↑	75	79	88↑	80↑	% not concerned 42
6 Capital	% easy access	39		66↓	53	47	43	66	81	51↓	% concerned 30
	% satisfied		72	80	49↓	51	67	74	83	61↓	% not concerned 45
7 Aspen	% easy access	44		73	53	61↑	41	67	80	51	% concerned 37↑
	% satisfied		70↓	80	52↓	58	64	71	81	67	% not concerned 40
8 Peace Country	% easy access	36↓		70	64	38	41	58	79	54	% concerned 34↑
	% satisfied		71↓	82	71↑	43↓	53↓	67↓	82	61↓	% not concerned 37
9 Northern Lights	% easy access	34↓		60↓	52	32↓	33↓	51↓	82	45↓	% concerned 31
	% satisfied		73	82	55	38↓	72	69	88↑	66	% not concerned 46

* percentage total of good, very good and excellent ratings

↑ = statistically significant higher ratings than other regions

↓ = statistically significant lower ratings than other regions

What's next?

This survey is an important first step in hearing from Albertans on how they assess the health care services they receive. It also helps to tell us where Albertans feel the health care system is serving them well and where the system can improve.

We believe this information will help health professionals, health system managers, government and Albertans in working together to improve health care delivery in the coming years.

As for the Health Commission, we will continue to build on the findings of the *Satisfaction with Health Care Services: A Survey of Albertans 2003* by making it the first of many studies of Albertans' assessment of health care quality, access, safety and service satisfaction.

We will report the results back to the public, health professionals and health care managers so we can measure progress in terms of addressing those areas in need of improvement.

The results of the survey have helped lay the groundwork for our focus in 2004 and beyond. Much of our research and collaborative effort will be outcome focused, directed to areas such as:

- primary care;
- patient safety; and,
- long-term care.

The Health Commission can be a catalyst for change in the health care system.

Many of the findings in our first health satisfaction survey are encouraging, but the system must continue to do better, to be more responsive to people's assessments of health care services, and to work together in a targeted fashion to continuously improve Alberta's health care system.

Acknowledgements

The Health Commission thanks all those Albertans who participated in this study.

Want more details?

To read the detailed survey results:
www.hsuoc.ca

Contact us:

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Fax: (403) 297-8258

E-mail: info@hsuoc.ca

Write us at:

Health Services Utilization and Outcomes Commission

Suite 210, 811-14th Street NW
Calgary, AB T2N 2A4

We'd like to hear from you...

Your ideas and comments are important to us. We want our work and the information we gather to be valuable to the health system and to each and every Albertan. Please fax or mail us your comments, or complete the online feedback form on our Web site at **www.hsuoc.ca.**